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AUTHOR Van Iten, Helga B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of intensive language workshops designed to upgrade and reinforce the language skills of high school foreign language teachers. Once the decision has been made to organize a workshop, the following steps might be taken: identifying the range of needs and interests of the teacher-participants, including the objectives of their home programs; establishing specific workshop objectives and selecting an organizational format from among several; structuring opportunities for teacher interaction; evaluating the teachers' language skills from writing samples, pre-workshop questionnaires, and interviews; and preparing for a workshop evaluation through participant surveys and comparison of pre-and post-workshop writing samples. A sample evaluation form is included. (MSE)

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Alternative Approaches to Intensive Language Refresher Workshops

for

High School Teachers

Helga van Iten

Once the preliminary decision has been made to organize a language refresher workshop - a decision which itself requires careful "market analysis", it is necessary to become well informed about the language capabilities of the workshop's prospective clientele. The range of need and interests among the prospective clientele should be identified early on in the planning process. This information can have the effect of making a single workshop inappropriate, for needs and interests may be so variable that a single group format simply will not adapt to the individual circumstances of the teachers one intends to attract. Thus, it may be necessary to organize several subgroups within the main workshop structure. Of course, doing so will have resource implications which must be thought through ahead of time. Information concerning needs and interests also serves to inform the workshop instructors about the language programs in which their clientele teach. Prospective workshop participants should be requested to provide a careful description of the objectives of the language program with which they are associated.

Having established that needs and interests justify the offering of a workshop, one must decide what the specific objectives of the workshop are to

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be and what organizational format shall be used. There are several alternative ways of proceeding at this point. One may offer a workshop which has as its primary objective the development of comprehensive working knowledge of the grammar of the target language with additional emphasis given to vocabulary development. This approach may be modified to create a second alternative, depending upon the needs and interest of the clientele to be served, by including a secondary objective designed to provide instructors with information and assistance relevant to the development of their own language programs. A third approach focuses its primary emphasis on the cultural environment. In this approach one takes advantage of opportunities to offer intensive instruction in the history, art, politics, economic and general cultural life of the country or countries in which the target language is natively spoken. When possible, this approach is planned so as to use the target language itself as frequently as is possible. And is best used when working with teachers whose speaking and reading proficiencies are quite well developed. A secondary objective which can conveniently be incorporated with this approach is an intermediate or advanced level grammar and vocabulary review.

It is obvious that one is free to combine elements of these alternative approaches to meet workshop participant needs. In the final analysis this decision should be guided by one's best estimate of what will most likely be successful in meeting needs and interests of the language teachers. It is invariably the case that persons who attend the workshop will expect and want to be become totally immersed in the target language. One must take care to allow for a good deal of variation in the speaking and comprehension abilities of the participants. Frequent one-on-one speaking opportunities are quite helpful in developing confidence in those participants who find larger group discussions intimidating.

Many language teachers are situated in one-teacher, single-language programs. They are literally starved for opportunities to interact with colleagues who share their interests and concerns. Structured opportunities for such interactions are an important part of a workshop - whatever general organizational approach is adopted. Provide participants opportunities to analyze and solve problems, using the target language whenever possible. It is reasonable to treat each participant in the workshop as a resource person. Thus, objectives and tasks should be designed so as to provide opportunities to function as teachers as well as students working separately and in small groups.

Before making the final decision as to which approach shall be adopted for planning the workshop it is worthwhile to request members of the clientele population to do some pre-workshop preparation. This type of preparation can be useful as a way of coping with the problem of variation in language fluency among the teachers one hopes to attract to the workshop. One must caution, however, against excessive use of this technique, for it is effective only in those cases where one has ample opportunity to give the teachers involved careful and comprehensive language fluency diagnosis. Prospective participants should be requested to provide the customary information one gathers by way of a questionnaire and go through an interview in which at least two professors of the target language participate. Some workshops may be too large to go through the process of having two professors evaluate all participants. But it is important to have some pre-workshop evaluation. A carefully planned interview can be easily carried out using standard telephone conference-call technology or by a simple telephone call. Many of the questions to be asked are raised in following up on the information provided in the general questionnaire each prospective student must complete. Others are

suggested by responses given in the course of the telephone-conference itself. In addition to the interview a writing sample of the participant's command of the target language offers the instructor yet another source of insight into the student's problem area(s). This writing sample, the theme of which students should be free to choose, must be submitted prior to the workshop. This writing essay sample should be retained for use in assessing student progress at the conclusion of the workshop. That is, students might be required to submit a second essay in the target language during the concluding phase of the workshop. A comparative analysis of the two essays involved in this approach will be quite useful in gauging student progress with regard to their ability to write in the target language. The same strategy can be followed in assessing oral proficiency progress. One merely needs to substitute taped interviews made at the beginning and conclusion of the workshop. It is, of course, possible to vary from an interview format when using this strategy by allowing students to record a reading exercise at the beginning and the end of a workshop. Obviously these strategies are time consuming. The information and insights acquired, however, are worth the effort. One must be diligent in remembering how important it is for participants to be able to discern unambiguously the progress they have made in the workshop. In the final analysis, whatever the specific objective of a workshop might be, the greatest and most lasting success is realized by those workshops which address the specific needs of individual participants in an orderly and intensive manner.

Evaluating a language workshop is no less and no more difficult than evaluating a standard language course. (See Appendix for a sample evaluation format.) It is essential that the objectives of a workshop are clearly stated and understood. Moreover, these objectives must be directly relevant to the workshop participants. It is also vital that participants understand how the

organization and procedures of the workshop relate to objectives. Finally, participants in the workshop must be instructed in the art of evaluating the impact of the workshop on their needs and interests. Far too often one neglects this aspect of workshop participation only to discover it after unnecessarily negative and indifferent attitudes have developed among participants. An additional factor which is always relevant to the task of evaluating a workshop involves a possible modification to the organizational approaches mentioned above. That is, depending upon needs, interests and resources, it is sometimes possible to incorporate in the format of a workshop the opportunity for assistance which continues beyond the time period of a workshop. Participants leave the intensive on-campus workshop with the understanding that they are invited to participate in post-workshop refresher and developmental sessions. Where this particular strategy is used, the matter of long-term effect is especially important. The problem of evaluating the outcome calls for careful information gathering. Progress among workshop participants in different areas of development can be quite variable. Thus, it is important that careful records be kept for each participant. This need exists in the case of standard workshop participants as well, for here, too, one must be concerned with long-term effects. (I should like to add here an aside which has to do with the expectations of workshops. Much of what one attempts to accomplish in intensive language workshops is premised on the expectation that participants will continue to practice and develop in those areas to which they have given close attention under the instructors guidance. Whatever approach is taken in the planning and execution of a workshop, it is absolutely essential that one helps workshop participants develop this ability for self-guided instruction. Most of the teachers with whom one works will return to instructional settings in which contact with language teachers is

minimal.) At the same time it is necessary to reiterate the belief that well conceived and well executed workshops are an important part of a supportive network system for high school and lower level foreign language teachers. Of course, it is no less important that university foreign language professors have ample opportunity for professional contact with colleagues in the elementary and secondary education sector.

APPENDIX

FOREIGN LANGUAGE WORKSHOP EVALUATION

French, German, Spanish

We prefer that you do NOT use YOUR name on this evaluation. Please use the back of the evaluation if you need more writing space.

I was enrolled in French _____: German _____: Spanish _____:

1. I prefer the course format indicated below:

_____	1.	3 weeks -- 8:30-12	3 semester credits
_____	2.	2 weeks -- 8:30- 4	3-4 semester credits
_____	3.	1 week -- 8:30- 4	2 semester credits
_____	4.	1 week -- 8:30-12	1 semester credits

2. If ISU sent a professor or professors in foreign languages to your area to conduct workshops would the foreign language teachers in your area attend it?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Probably would _____ Probably would not

3. What attracted you to the ISU Language Workshop?

_____ needed barrier credits _____ close to home _____ cost

_____ format of workshop _____ other (specify)

4. What features did you like the most about the workshop?

5. What features did you like the least?

6. What, in your opinion, are the unique needs of secondary foreign language teachers?

7. What, if anything, do you think colleges and universities should do to meet these needs?

8. Should workshops include methods components? _____ Yes _____ No

9. For a 2 week workshop with 3 1/2 hours per day, how much time per day (average) do you think a participant can be expected to spend in preparation outside of class?

10. Reference is made to #9. How much time did you spend per day in preparation for class (average).

11. Re: credits. Should workshops be offered on a variable credit basis, such as 2 or 3, with the third credit being a project, special investigation, etc.

12. Was your workshop experience worth the effort? If so, why/why not?

13. Please rate the book used: 1 2 3 4 5 (1=low, 5=high)

14. Please rate the workshop brochure and other informational workshop literature: 1 2 3 4 5 (1=low, 5=high)

15. In your judgement, the workshop instructor(s) were well prepared: 1 2 3 4 5 (1=low, 5=high)

16. In your judgement, the workshop instructor(s) succeeded in individualizing the workshop sessions: 1 2 3 4 5 (1=low, 5=high)

17. In your judgement, the workshop instructor(s) were successful in helping you achieve the goal you had set for yourself: 1 2 3 4 5 (1=low, 5=high)

18. Please make whatever suggestions you have which might improve our workshops.